

Nancy de Pastino
Regional Manager, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America
Missoula, Montana * ndepastino@momsdemandaction.org

Re: Law and Justice Interim Committee, PLEASE SUBMIT MENTAL HEALTH RECORDS TO NICS

Good morning, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Nancy de Pastino, and I'm the Montana chapter leader and a regional manager for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. More importantly, I'm a mom to two young Montana schoolchildren. Last week, both my kids' schools went into lockdown because of two armed robberies, thought to have been committed by an escaped convicted rapist, armed and dangerous in Missoula.

Every day, I work to educate people about gun violence and how to prevent it. Many of you may not realize that nearly eight children lose their lives to gun violence each day in America. There have been 44 school shootings since the Sandy Hook tragedy. If this pace keeps up, this number may double by the end of this year. So, learning that my own kids were in a lockdown situation was incredibly unnerving, to say the least. It's possible this suspect never intended to enter a school, but what if the next one does? Getting criminal records into NICS helps enforce the law and save lives.

I don't like that my second grader knows what to do when a gunman comes to her classroom, or the fact that this scenario has even entered the consciousness of American schoolchildren. While necessary when a threat is identified, lockdowns are purely reactionary and do not get to the root of the problem: dangerous people with easy access to guns. Rather than training our children to hide from the bad guys, shouldn't we be focusing on keeping guns out of dangerous hands? Are you personally doing everything you can to ensure your children never have to experience the terror of a lockdown at their school?

There is no simple solution to ending gun violence in our schools, but there are some common-sense things we can do, like strengthening our background check system. History has proven that background checks work—since the system was created, more than two million gun purchases were blocked from prohibited buyers. Unfortunately, background checks are not universal... there are loopholes in the system that allow gun sales to occur without a check, like independent sales at gun shows and online transactions. This means that on any given day, anyone with a criminal history or a severe mental illness can buy a gun at will... no questions asked. Providing a legal way for dangerous people to obtain guns is simply outrageous. This needs to stop.

Last summer I was in DC meeting with Senators Baucus and Tester about expanding background checks. Baucus' legislative director said to me, "why would expanding background checks do anything when Montana doesn't even report mental health records to NICS?" I responded that when lives are on the line, the answer is not to throw up our hands and do nothing.

Reporting criminal and mental health records to NICS and making background checks a requirement for all gun sales is the simplest, most effective, and frankly, the most politically palatable solution we have for keeping our kids and our communities safe. 79 percent of Montanans want universal background checks. I urge you to show your support for this common-sense solution, for the health and safety of our children, families and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Nancy de Pastino

Law and Justice Meeting
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